MY OWN ACCOUNT OF THE FIRST DAY AT SHILOH

By LEW WALLACE

THE GENERAL'S DEFENSE OF HIS SO-CALLED BLUNDER IN THE FAMOUS BATTLE

This account of the movements (April 6, 1862) of the Third Division, Army of the Tennessee, under command of General Wallace at the Battle of Shiloh was written more than ten years ago, in the form of a letter to General James Grant Wilson, who was then engaged in writing his "Life of Grant." The author promised that if he survived General Wallace he would some day publish the letter in full. The document is here first brought to light.

IT was in the evening of Thursday, the 3d of April, that I became assured of a great battle close at hand.

My first brigade (Smith's) was in camp on the bluff overhanging the landing at Crump's; the second (Thayer's) was on a farm which the wits had christened "Stoney Lonesome," probably two miles and a half west of the Landing; and beyond that a like distance, at a village called Adamsville, lay my third brigade (Wood's).

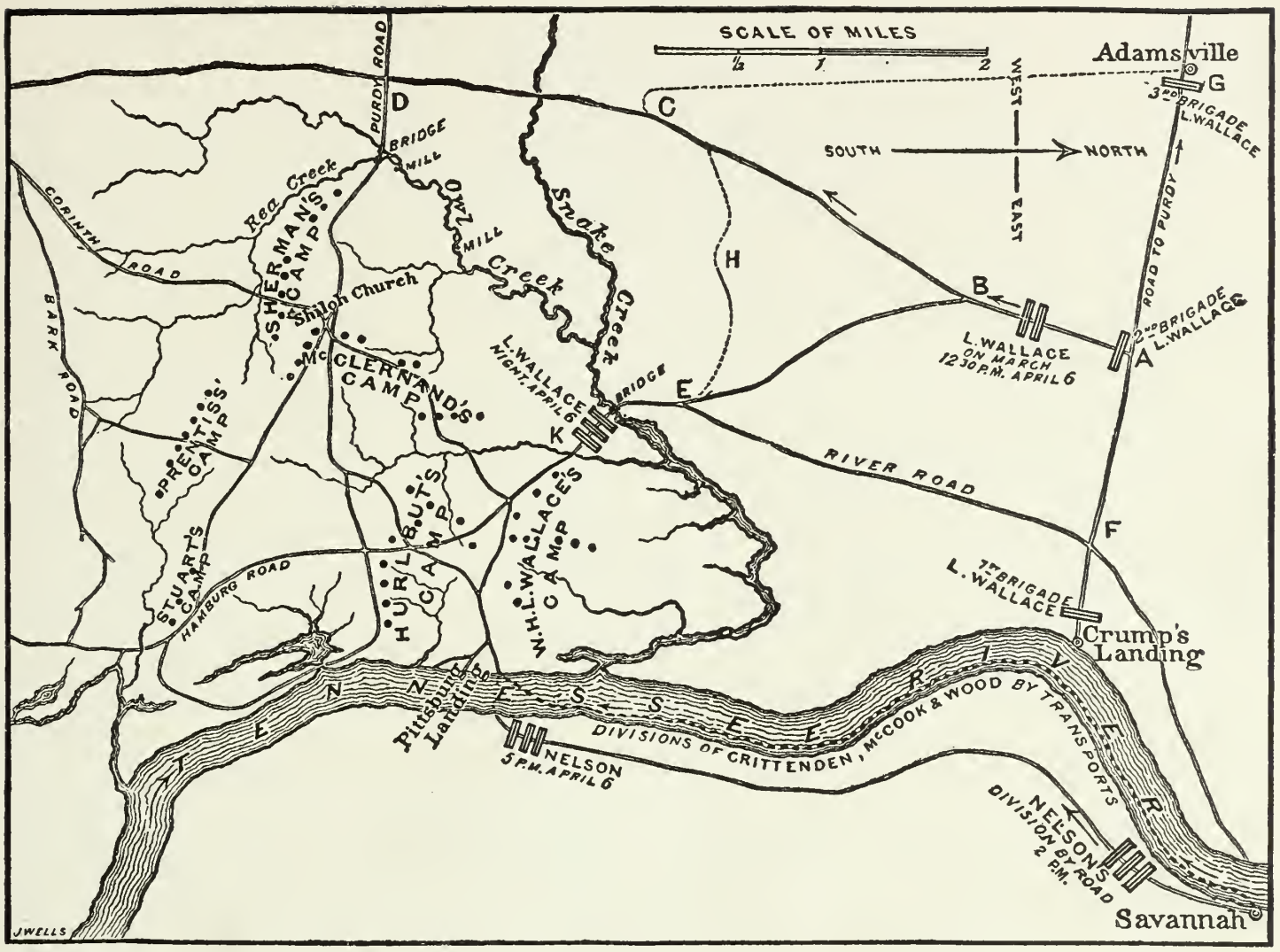
This disposition of my brigades, though of my own ordering, had been approved by General Grant.

A short distance from the camp of my second brigade ("Stoney Lonesome") there was a junction of roads, one fork of which led to Pittsburg Landing by way of a bridge, the other to the right of the army under Sherman, the distance from the farm to both points being about six miles. It occurred to me that it would be good policy to control both of those roads. I had ordered Major Myers to build bridges over the forks of Snake Creek, repair the bridge at the crossing of Owl Creek near Sherman's camp, and corduroy wherever there was a swamp or mudhole; all this to enable my batteries, if the need came, to traverse the route at the gallop.

The bridging and corduroying were finished about April 3d, possibly a day or two sooner; then I felt comparatively easy, for, with respect to our army, I was no longer at the long end of an L, but, as it were, in the junction corner of a V, the right side of which would bring Sherman to me or take me to him swift or slow according to the need, while the left side would be equally serviceable were I required at Pittsburg Landing. Such were my communications with the main army and the disposition of my brigades the evening of the crisis precipitated by General Johnston's advance from Corinth.

On the 6th, the memorable Sunday, a sentinel woke me from sleep on the steamboat serving me for headquarters. He reported cannonading up the river. When I reached the hurricane deck dawn was breaking. The air was humid and heavy, but still. The guns were quite audible. Five minutes —ten—and then the irregular pounding, sometimes distinct, sometimes muffled, kept skurrying down the yellow flood of the river. Directly the camp on the bluff became astir.

My staff officers reported to me. One of them (Lieutenant Wave) I sent to Colonel Smith with direction to form his brigade, and conduct it to "Stoney Lonesome." Another (Major James R. Ross) was dispatched at speed to Colonel Thayer with orders to have everything ready to move; continuing his ride, he bore an order to Colonel Wood of the third brigade to break camp, send baggage and property to the Landing (Crump's), and bring



From "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War" (The Century Co., N. Y.)

MAP OF THE ROUTES BY WHICH GEN. GRANT WAS REËNFORCED AT PITTSBURG LANDING

General Wallace's division marched along the route indicated by A B C. When halted by Captain Rowley, the division stretched along the road from C to D, about two miles. The countermarch was along the route C H E.

his regiments to the rendezvous at "Stoney Lonesome." The purpose of these orders was to have the division ready for movement when General Grant, who was at Savannah for the night, should pass in his dispatch boat going up the river.

About 8.30 o'clock, General Grant drew alongside, and a conversation substantially (almost literally) the following took place:

"Have you heard the firing?" he asked.

"Yes, I have been listening to it since daybreak."

"What do you think of it?"

"It is undoubtedly a general engagement."

"What have you in your front?"

"There is nothing reported."

He then said, after thought, "Very well. Hold yourself in readiness for orders."

"But, General, I ordered the concentration about daylight. I am ready now."

Again he reflected. He seemed uncertain. It afterwards came out that he believed the real attack would be on me. Presently he repeated, "Hold yourself in readiness to move in any direction." The pilot bell rang, the lashings were removed, and his steamer put off up stream, hard as it could go.

There was general disappointment among my officers. I was disappointed; but without remark I left the boat. My last order at the Landing was to have a horse saddled and bridled, and hitched to a tree on the bluff, that a messenger coming down the river with an order for me might bring it without delay. Thereupon I rode out to "Stoney Lonesome," where Smith and Thayer were waiting, arms stacked. The third brigade had not yet arrived.

The men were clustered together in groups. They were doing little talking. Their faces were turned to the south—listening. Occasionally musketry could be heard accompanying the artillery. Smith and Thayer, and their staff officers, collected around me, and were surprised when I told them the order General Grant had left me.

Ten o'clock, and still the air laden with noises of the struggle going on—still no order;

10.30—yet no order. Smith got into his saddle and rode away, saying, "I guess Grant sees he can get along without us."

Eleven o'clock. The firing was no longer continuous, but at intervals and in outbursts. Thayer suggested that an order might have been started, and the messenger intercepted. I thought not; for if the situation on the field called for us, the possibility of accident to a courier by land would necessitate sending him by boat. So I ordered a staff officer, Major Ross, to ride to the Landing and see if anyone had come down by the river. About half a mile down the road he met an officer on the horse I had left, who asked him where General Wallace was. Ross told him; then he asked in turn if he had orders for General Wallace. The officer said he had, and gave the major a paper, which the major read. In a short time, Captain Baxter, A. Q. U. of General Grant's, introduced himself to me, and placed the paper in my hand, saying, "Here is an order."

Our watches showed 11.30 o'clock. The officers of my staff and of Thayer's closed around me, while I read. The paper was a half sheet of foolscap, dented with boot heels, and soiled with tobacco juice; and it was folded, not enveloped. The writing was in pencil. Strangest of all, no signature was attached. I passed the paper to Thayer to read, and, turning to Baxter, asked, "How is the fight going, captain?"

Baxter replied, "Very well. We are repulsing them all along the line."

The paper was returned to me, and I read it a second time, and, noticing its deficiencies, inquired:

"Who is this from, captain?"

"General Grant."

"Why is it not signed?"

He then explained: "I received the order verbally. Not being used to carrying orders, I picked the paper from the floor of the cabin as I came down, and wrote what you see. I was afraid I might make a mistake."

General Grant, speaking of the order, has several times said that he sent it to me not later than ten o'clock; that it directed me to march *to Pittsburg Landing by the lower or river road;* that he gave it verbally to a staff officer, and did not know what it was when delivered to me. Of course, he could not know, but I do; and others, some dead, some living, who read it, have given their accounts of it, so that I can speak with confidence. Here it is—as I received it, mark you—almost verbatim:

> "You will leave a sufficient force at Crump's Landing to guard the public property there; with the rest of your division march and form junction with the right of the army, your line at right angles with river, and be governed by circumstances."

Observe, if you please, that the words *by the lower or river road to Pittsburg Landing* are omitted, leaving nothing but a naked direction for me to march and form junction *with the right of the army.*

Do I deny General Grant's version of the order? I believe he ordered me to Pittsburg Landing by the river road, because he says he did, and because at ten o'clock, when the whole army was slowly and sullenly retiring to the river, it was the order logically right and first to present itself. Moreover, by inserting in the body of the order actually brought me the words *to Pittsburg Landing by the lower or river road,* we have sense in the other direction to "form my line of battle at right angles with the river," otherwise without sense. At the right of the army, out three miles from the Landing, how was the angle to be ascertained? Why then did I not lead my column to Pittsburg Landing? And I answer, because the order Captain Baxter delivered to me contained no mention of Pittsburg Landing or of any road. Satisfied that I comprehended it, I passed the paper to Colonel Thayer; others about us at the moment read it. I gave it finally to Captain Kneffler, my adjutant-general, who probably stuck it under his sword belt. It was lost during the day. On account of its informality, he attached no importance to it, and, as I shared the opinion, I never blamed him.

My first thought was, where is the right of the army? Captain Baxter's good news settled the point. If not where it was in the morning, then Sherman must have advanced. In short, Sherman's camp was now my goal, and I knew it as just beyond the bridge at the junction of Owl and Snake Creeks on the road from Pittsburg Landing to Purdy. To get to it by the shortest route and in the quickest time from the corner of the V my brigades were in, I must take the right-hand road. General Grant has said in a footnote of his "Memoirs" that in the absence of an express direction, if I had been an older soldier I would have marched to Pittsburg Landing and thence, as from a base, out to Sherman. I think not. He forgot the news I had from

Baxter as to the condition of the battle; besides which, by taking the right line of the road fork, the distance of the march would be reduced nearly, if not quite, three miles; in addition to which, again, the column would be on the very road Myers had bridged and corduroyed for me. So I sent word to Myers to lead out for the Owl Creek bridge next to Sherman's camp.

I asked myself, to be sure, if we are beating the enemy, and he is on the run, why the want of me? And why the order to form my line at right angles with the river? I could not answer, but rested implicitly on the order. Grant was on the ground—he knew—that was enough. The idea of defeat never entered my mind; and starting, as I was, with intelligence of a victory already won by our army, what ground is there for the imputation that I had the achievement of some special glory in purpose?

The road we were pursuing had been well repaired. The cavalry had done its work substantially, and we bowled along. By the firing we could tell we were nearing the battle. We took no note of time. Somewhere about half after one o'clock—I remember the head of the column was reported in the vicinity of the Owl Creek bridge—a cavalry officer, quite young and capless, covered with mud, slashed across the forehead, rode up from the rear, and asked:

"Are you General Wallace?"

Without pulling rein I replied.

"General Grant," he said, "has sent me to tell you to hurry up."

Up? To the right of the army, of course; so I returned: "Give General Grant my compliments, and tell him I will be up in a few minutes."

The courier rode off the way he came; a circumstance which, if I had had the slightest suspicion that my movement was in error, would have prompted calling him back for question.

So, in absolute unconsciousness of mistake, I pushed on. Several times officers came to me, and remarked upon the firing so far down on our left. And it was curious. Had we been repulsing the enemy, he should have been in the south, not so nearly in the southeast. But I settled the point, at least to my own satisfaction. "The fighting has ceased in front of Sherman; but they are keeping it up away over on our left." From the position my column was then in, the left of our army should have been well down toward the river in an almost easterly direction—certainly far enough in that direction to dispose of the *only* mistake General Grant attributes to me in the footnote corrective of the text in his "Memoirs."

Finally the revelation overtook me. A second messenger came up from the rear. It was Captain Rowley, well known as of General Grant's staff. He it was who reported to his chief that he found me marching to Purdy, and several miles farther from the battlefield than when I started. From "Stoney Lonesome," Purdy lies west; whereas the road upon which he overtook me runs almost due south, and Shiloh church, marking the left of Sherman's camp, could not have been to exceed two miles from where Rowley and I held the conversation which I will give very nearly in exact words. The fact is, he was himself out of his reckoning, if not lost.

"I've had a devil of a time to find you," he said, in high excitement.

"I am sorry to have put you to trouble," I returned, checking my horse. "What is it?"

"The General has sent me to hurry you up."

"That's the second message of the kind in ten minutes. I don't understand it."

"Where are you going anyhow?"

"To join Sherman."

"Sherman!"

"Yes."

"Come to one side with me." We went a little out of the road.

"Great God!" he said, "don't you know that Sherman has been driven from his camp? And that the whole army is now within half a mile of the Landing, and it's a question if we are not all to be driven into the river?"

To my exclamations, Captain Rowley went into details. There are kinds of fear; but nothing of that nature can shoot one's marrow so to the core as the dread of making a mistake in a situation such as Rowley then flung me. Yet I could see with astonishing distinctness that I had led my division into the rear of the rebel army, or rather that the whole victorious army was between me and Grant.

My first impulse was to go on. A vigorous assault upon the enemy's rear might turn defeat into victory. Two years later at City Point, General Grant told me that if he had known at Shiloh what he then knew, he would have ordered me where I started to go. To which I add, if I had known the moment Rowley was talking to me that General Nelson was on the right bank of the Tennessee

with a possibility of crossing his division to the left bank at Pittsburg Landing before night, I would have continued my march at all hazards. As it was, I did not even know that General Buell was within fifty miles of Savannah. Why, in the morning at Crump's Landing, General Grant did not tell me that a considerable part of the Army of the Ohio was within supporting distance of the Army of the Tennessee, has been a mystery to me from that day to this. It must have been that he did not yet believe there was seriousness in the rebel demonstration at Pittsburg Landing.

Captain Rowley, it is to be observed, did not estimate that there was a mistake in my movement to the right of the army. I told him it was plain that I was in rear of the rebel army, and asked categorically: "What does General Grant want me to do? Do you bring me an order from him?"

"Yes," he replied. "General Grant wants you to go to Pittsburg Landing, and he wants you there like hell."

"Very well, I shall obey him," I said. "But it will be necessary for me to back out of this, and find a crossroad to take the column into the river road. You have just come through the swamps; stay now, and pilot me."

He declined, and presently left me; then, thinking to find a crossing into the river road before the head of the column would lap the foot, I sent Captain Kneffler, who was still with Major Myers at the Owl Creek bridge, intelligence of the altered situation, and a desire that he would remain with Myers and help take care of the rear. Thereupon I ordered a countermarch brigades. The tactics of the movement have been criticised, and I now think justly. I should have resorted to a right about of column.

Note now, please—when we thus changed direction, from the south facing north, it was to march completely around the left flank of the Confederate army. Note also—when the countermarch was ordered, not only was my cavalry holding the bridges at Owl Creek, scarcely a half mile from the bluff on which the right of Sherman's division rested in the morning, but Thayer's advance guard had been some time turned into the Hamburg-Purdy road, and could not have been to exceed three-quarters of a mile from the bridge. And, marvelous to say, not a sign of the enemy had been seen! The inference is that the rear of the Confederates was unguarded. Indeed, it has been told me by reputable officers of their side that at the time of my approach there were fully as many of their soldiers looting and drinking in the captured camps as there were of ours burrowing under the bluffs down at the Landing. Who shall tell the result had I been permitted to go on in my march? Many a time, seeing as we see in dreams, I have beheld Thayer's deployed regiments moving through those tented streets, a wave crested with bayonets, and heard the demoralized hordes rushing panic-struck upon their engaged lines. And now, in moments when personal ambition gets the better of me, I hold Rowley's coming my greatest quarrel with Fortune. Oh, if he had remained lost in the woods an hour longer!

In course of the countermarch we came to a crossroad on what appeared to be the highlands of Snake Creek, and turned into it column right. Thereafter it was out of one hole into another—a long interminable slough.

Just before we entered the river road, Colonel McPherson (afterwards major-general) and Major Rawlins (afterwards major-general and Secretary of War) met me, having, like the preceding messengers, been dispatched to hurry me up. Their account of the fight was more sickening than Rowley's. Rawlins, of an earnest, devoted nature, was greatly excited. McPherson was quiet and thoughtful. Rawlins speedily expressed dissatisfaction with the progress making. I told him the men were doing their best. He next insisted that the batteries be thrown to one side; they were hampering the infantry. That advice I rejected. His next proposal was to send the regiments forward as they arrived. That I also declined. There should be no piecemealing in the business. The division must go in as a unit. To McPherson he privately suggested arresting me. McPherson did not encourage the idea. About that time there was a report come up that there was a growing interval between the second and third brigades. I sent my entire staff back to urge the advance. Dismounting, I took a seat on a log, and announced that there should be no further advance until the division was closed up solidly. The necessities on the field were plain; the general wanted the *division*, and he should have it. The two left me before the lower bridge over Snake Creek was reached.

As we drew near the Snake Creek bridge the advance guard met groups of fugitives from the fight. To Smith, then in advance, I gave orders to deploy a regiment immediately

that the bridge was passed; if he came upon strange people, he was not to fire a shot, but go at them with the bayonet. Birge's sharpshooters were the only troops met, and they disappeared before Smith could communicate with them. In the gathering dusk they failed to recognize us.

Night fell while the column was passing the bridge. Upon the earth nowhere was there so much as the light of a camp-fire. With the going down of the sun the battle and its noises had ceased, succeeded, however, by the flounder of an army worrying through what seemed a shoreless bog.

I had expected to find orders and a guide at the bridge. Rawlins and McPherson might have remembered me in that way. Smith had found it impossible to get forward with a deployed regiment; so in files of four, and feeling for the road, the commands staggered on. At length, thinking there was room enough on the solid ground at last gained for the division to stand, I called halt, and directed facing to the right and alignment to the best advantage. Pickets were sent out.

Then the cloud overhead burst, and it was rain, rain by the bucketful, but no lightning. Our blood was chilling; so were our spirits.

The situation grew intolerable. My orderlies dispersed themselves to the left and rear. Now and then they brought in stragglers, whom I examined.

"Where is the enemy?"

No two of them pointed the same direction.

Then I rode in the search, but soon returned. In the thribbled darkness there was danger of separation from the division. In short, nothing was to be done while the night endured—nothing but wait. McPherson and Rawlins knew I was coming, and I knew I would be wanted in the morning. So I dismounted, and crouched on the sheltered side of a tree.

Toward morning an officer of the pickets brought me a man able to tell me that my division was on the crest of the eastern slope of Tighlman's Creek, a wet-weather brook emptying into Snake Creek; that the Confederates held the crest of the opposite slope, scarcely a thousand yards distant. I directed Thurber and Brown to post their eleven guns that they might open a concentrated fire.

A happy chance had dropped my command into a position which could scarcely have been bettered.

In the hollow of Tighlman's Creek night was turning gray when the report of a cannon brought every sleeper to his feet It was the first gun of the second day of battle. Hardly had the echo time to get back to us before the enemy replied with a round shot. All our pieces then rang out together, and the fight to a finish was on.

The sun crept slowly up, bringing a very cheerless dawn. The duel between the artillerists raged hot, and in the midst of it General Grant rode to me. One orderly attended him. Looking at him, and listening to what took place between us, no man could have believed that he thought he had lost a great battle the day before.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning, General," I responded, saluting.

"Are you ready to advance?"

"Ready, sir."

He glanced down the line to get its general direction, turned his horse to the front, waved his hand, and said:

"Well, move out that way."

"I shall be on the extreme right then?"

"Yes."

"Who will be on my left?"

"I will take care of that," he said.

As he was going off, I rode after him.

"Excuse me, General; is there any particular order of attack you would have me take?"

"No," he returned, "I leave that to your discretion."

He was not out of sight before my order was passing down: "By echelon of regiments—left in front—forward."

Once again that day he came to me. I judge it about five o'clock in the afternoon. The same orderly was with him. If in the morning, after a supposed defeat, he had shown no depression, now that he had won a great victory he showed no exultation.

"We are doing very well," he said quietly.

"This in my front I take to be their rear guard," I replied.

"Wheel your division quarter to the right."

The proper instructions were issued; then he added, "I will see you later."

Through Sherman's looted camp, and beyond it nearly a mile, we drove the enemy, given no time to rally. All day my gallant division had fought a good fight. Not an inch had it yielded. Once only I halted it, waiting for support to come up on my left. Colonel Willick's regiment, Army of the Ohio, was all that reached me, and by him I was first informed of General Buell's presence on the field.